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CHILDREN'S LIES.

During the past few years a small number of accomplished and tact-full lady teachers, finding in even the best ethical literature little help in understanding and in dealing with certain current and more or less licensed forms of juvenile dishonesty connected with modern school-life, have undertaken, as a first step towards getting a fresh and independent view of the facts of the situation, to question and observe individual children, by a pre-determined system, as to their ideals and practises, and those of their mates in this regard. These returns now represent nearly three hundred city children of both sexes, mostly from twelve to fourteen years of age, selected, generally, by the teachers as average or representative children in this respect, and interviewed privately and in an indirect way, most carefully so designed as to avoid all indelicacy to the childish conscience. From the nature of the subject, and from the diverse degrees, not only of interest, but even of trustworthiness of the individual returns, as well from the fact that the experience and opinion of many teachers were also gathered, the results hardly admit tabular statistical presentation. A general statement of them, according to the groups into which they naturally fall, will be serviceable, it is hoped, to thoughtful parents and teachers as well as to psychologists.

I. No children were found destitute of high ideals of truthfulness. Perhaps the lowest moral development is represented by about a dozen children who regarded every deviation from the most painfully literal truth as alike heinous, with no perspective or degrees of difference between white and black fibbing and the most barefaced intended or unintended lies. This mental state, though in a few cases probably priggish and affected, became in others so neurotic that to every statement, even to yes and no, "I think" or "perhaps," was added mentally, whispered, or in two cases aloud, and nothing could prompt a positive, unqualified assertion. This condition, not unknown among adults in certain morbid states of conscience, we will designate as *pseudophobia*, and place it among the many other morbid fears that prey upon unformed or unpoised minds. One boy told of "spells" of saying over hundreds of times when alone the word "not," in the vague hope it might somehow be inter-

polated into the divine record of his many wrong stories, past and future, to disinfect them and neutralize his guilt. Another had a long period of fear that like Ananias and Sapphira he might some moment drop down dead for a chance and perhaps unconscious lie. As in barbaric lands a score of crimes, though perhaps recognized as of different degrees of depravity, are worthy the maximal penalty of death, so inaccuracies of statement, though distinguished from blacker falsehoods, are still lies, though unintended. This moral superstition, which seemed mostly due to mixing ethical and religious teaching in unpedagogic ways or proportions in home or Sunday school, is happily rare, generally fugitive, is not germane to the nature of childhood, and is likely to rectify itself. Where it persists it begets a quibbling, word-splitting tendency, a *logolatry*, or a casuistic habit resulting sometimes in very systematized palliatives, tricks and evasions, which may become distinctly morbid. There are few children even at the beginning of public school life who need much help in distinguishing between unintentional and premeditated wrong statements, and yet a little aid in so doing, if given with proper illustrations and tact, is almost sure to be serviceable in developing a healthful moral consciousness. Of this state we desire more records of cases with details illustrative of cause and cure, etc.

II. Strongly contrasted with this state, and far more common, is that in which lies are justified as means to noble ends. Children all admire burly boys who by false confessions take upon themselves the penalties for the sins of weaker playmates, or even girls who are conscious of being favorites with teacher or parent, or of superior powers of blandishment, and who claim to be the authors of the misdeeds of their more disfavored mates. The situations, especially the latter, were met with many times, and the act was always approved though often with some rather formal qualifications. One case, which bore traces of idealization, was described in which the quality of the heroism was of almost epic magnificence, and the sin-bearer's gracious lie seemed to have quite passed out of sight. A teacher who told her class of thirteen-year-old children the tale of the French girl in the days of the commune, who, when on her way to execution on a petty charge, met her betrothed and responded to his agonized appeals, "Sir, I do not know you," and passed on to death alone because she feared recognition might involve him in her doom, was saddened because she found it so hard to make her pupils name as a lie what was so eclipsed by heroism and love. Children have a wholesome instinct for viewing moral situations as wholes, but yet are not insensi-

tive to that eager and sometimes tragic interest which has always for all men invested those situations in both life and in literature where duties seem to conflict. The normal child feels the heroism of the unaccountable instinct of self-sacrifice far earlier and more keenly than it can appreciate the sublimity of truth. Theoretic or imagined cases of this kind were often volunteered by the children with many variations. They declare, *e. g.*, that they would say that their mother was out when she was in, if it would save her life, giving quite a scenic setting to such a possible occurrence, adding infrequently that this would not make it *exactly* right, though it would be their duty to do it, or that they would not tell a like lie to save their own lives. A doctor, too, many suggested, might tell an over-anxious patient or dearest friend that there was hope, easing his conscience, perhaps, by reflecting that they had some though he had none. In confronting such cases, it is the conscientious parent or teacher who is most liable to get nervous and err. It is feared, that although the end is very noble and the fib or quibble very petty at first, worse lies for meaner objects may follow. The fondness and even sense of exhilaration, with which children often describe such situations, is often due to a feeling of ease-ment from a rather tedious sense of the obligation of indiscriminating, universal and rigorously literal veracity, under which also very often lurks an effort to find the flavor of exculpation for more inexcusable lies. The teacher may by multiplying, analyzing, or even by too much attention to such cases develop a kind of morbid ethical self-consciousness and precocity. He may, as the history of education shows, make even children into casuists gravely disputing about the grand moral forces that beneath all others make the world of man their revelation or their sport. No two children and no two moral situations are alike. Here human science faces problems still too complex for formulation, where the adult has really very little to teach the child, and where conference and suggestion, and even instruction, should be restricted to specific and individual cases and not lapse into generalization. The special pedagogic utilization of these cases should generally, we believe, be the following. The child who gets really interested in what it deems the conflict of veracity with other duties, may be reverently referred to the inner light of its own conscience. This seems to be a special opportunity of nature for teaching the need of keeping a private protestant tribunal where personal moral convictions preside, and which alone enables men to adapt themselves to new ethical situations or environments.

III. With most children, as with savages, truthfulness is

greatly affected by personal likes and dislikes. In many cases they could hardly be brought to see wrong in lies a parent or some kind friend had wished them to tell. Often suspected lies were long persisted in till they were asked if they would have said that to their mothers, when they at once weakened. No cases were more frequent than where, in answer to a friend's question, if some thing or act they did not particularly admire, was not very nice or pretty, they found it hard to say no, and compromised on "kind of nice," or "pretty enough," when if a strange pupil had asked they would have had no trouble with their consciences. The girls in our returns were more addicted to this class of lies than boys. Boys keep up joint or comploted lies which girls rarely do, who "tell on" others because they are "sure to be found out," or "some one else will tell," while boys can be more readily brought to confess small thefts, and are surer to own up if caught, than girls. A question of personal interest with girls is how far etiquette may stretch truth to avoid rudeness or hurting others' feelings. All children find it harder to cheat in their lessons with a teacher they like. Friendships are cemented by frank confidences and secrets and promises not to tell, as adults with real attachments desire to know and be known without reservation, without over-praise or flattery, and to rely on and perform pledges. To simulate or dissimulate to the priest, or above all, to God, was repeatedly referred to as worst of all. On the other hand, with waning attachment, promises not to tell weaken in their validity. Strange children, and especially impertinent meddlers, may be told "I do not know" when one means "none of your business" as a mental reservation. Children say they are not going to a place they intend to visit to avoid unwelcome company, and victimize an enemy by any lie or strategy they can invent. Truth for our friends and lies for our enemies is a practical, though not distinctly conscious rule widely current with children, as with uncivilized and, indeed, even with civilized races. Rural children are more liable to long and close intimacies, and are more shy and suspicious of all strangers. The sense of personal loyalty to those who are admired is so strong that it has produced, not only many kinds and systems of fagging, but inclines children to mistake what pleases their idol as good and true. If their favorites desire or even admit them to lie or cheat for their benefit, as false codes sometimes require, if extravagant vows or protestations are made that cannot be kept, or that must be kept at great moral cost, or if too many secrets are shared that need often to be guarded by prevarications, then children are being trained for corrupt combina-

tions of any sort in adult life. On the other hand it is through the instinct of personal fealty, so strong in children that most men have grown up to a sense of fidelity to God and even of the obligation of scientific truthfulness. It has taken mankind long enough to learn the sublimity of a kind of truthfulness which is no respecter of persons. The best correction of this general tendency of children, we believe to be instruction in science, the moral needs and uses of which alone call loudly for more of it and better. But the teachers of younger children should look well to their friendships, and study, especially, the character of leaders and favorites and try to mould it as well as strive to be loved by all, not forgetting that only children with bad friends are worse off than those with none, and that they will be more faithful to great causes for having been faithful to dear and good friends.

IV. The greatest number of lies in our collections are prompted by some of the more familiar manifestations of selfishness. Every game, especially, every exciting one, has its own temptation to cheat; and long records of miscounts in tallies, moving balls in croquet, crying out "no play" or "no fair" at critical moments to divert impending defeat, false claims made to umpires, and scores of others show how unscrupulous the all-constraining passion to excel often renders even young children. In those games which attract wider attention, where sets of picked players are pitted against one another, and its prizes in local fame are great and immediate, dexterity in cheating is sometimes regarded as a legitimate qualification along with others, the only discredit being, as in the lies Spartan children were encouraged to tell, in getting found out. Lies of this kind, prompted by excitement, are so easily forgotten when the excitement is over that they rarely rankle, and are hard to get at, but they make boys unscrupulous and grasping. School life is responsible for very many, if not most of the deliberate lies of this class. Where the vicious system of self-reporting for petty offenses, like whispering, exists, children confess not showing their hands when they are guilty. If pressed to tell if they saw or did a wrong they lie, and add, perhaps, that it is very easy to lie to get out of school scrapes. Few will not give, and not many will not take prompts or peep in their books, especially if in danger of being dropped or failing of promotion. Children copy school work and monitors get others to do theirs as pay for not reporting them, while if a boy is reported he tells of as much disorder as possible on the part of others, to show that the monitor did not do his duty. As school work is now done, much of it is of a kind that can be bought and sold. One teacher in a large city stated that so much

more than they could really do was now required of her pupils that she and her teacher friends were now obliged, in order that their rooms should not be unfavorably reported, to rewrite the English exercises of many of their pupils, to be copied again by them before being seen by the examiners who had no time to see the work in process of doing. This could hardly have been a lesson in honesty to the pupils. The long list of headaches, nosebleeds, stomach-aches, etc., feigned to get out of or avoid going to school, of false excuses for absence and tardiness, the teacher, especially if disliked, being so often exceptionally fair game for all the arts of deception; all this seems generally prevalent. This class of lies ease children over so many hard places in life and are convenient covers for weakness and even vice. To lie easily and skilfully removes the restraint of the more or less artificial consequences attached by home and school to childish wrong-doing, and increased immunity always tempts to sin. The facility with which a whole street or school may be corrupted in this respect, often without suspicion on the part of adults, by a single bold, bad, but popular child, the immunity from detection which school offers so much more than home for even habitual lies of this class, as well as the degree of moral degradation to which they may lead, all point to selfish falsehoods—especially when their prevalence is taken into account—as on the whole the most dangerous, corrupting, and hard to correct of any of our species. Excessive emulations, penalties, opportunities, and temptations should of course be reduced, but it should be clearly seen that all these lies are at bottom, in a peculiar sense, forms of self-indulgence, and should, in the great majority of cases, be treated as such, rather than dealt with directly as lies. The bad habits they cover should be patiently sought out and corrected, for those who habitually do ill are sure to learn to lie to conceal it. The sense of meanness this slowly breeds must be met by appeals to honor, self-respect, self-control. Hard and even hated tasks, and rugged moral and mental regimen should supplement those modern methods which make education a sort of self-indulgence of natural interests.

V. Much childish play owes its charm to partial self-deception. Children imagine or make believe they are animals, making their noises and imitating their activities; that they are soldiers, and imagine panoramas of warlike events; that they are hunters in extreme peril from wild beasts; Indians, artisans, and tradesmen of many kinds; doctors, preachers, angels, ogres. They play school, court, meeting, congress. If hit with wooden daggers in the game of war they stand aside and play they are dead. If they step on a crack in

walking the floor, curbing, sidewalk, etc., they call it they are poisoned. Protruding spots of earth or land in pools or ponds, or at half-tide in the bay, suggest the geography of a continent, and in one case, for years, Boston, Providence, West Indies, Gibraltar, Brooklyn Bridge were thus designated by all the children of a large school in their plays. In another, a dozen hills and valleys, rills, near by were named from fancied resemblance to the familiar mountains, rivers and valleys of the geography. The play-house sometimes is so real as to have spoons for barrels of flour, pounded rotten wood for sugar, pumpkin chairs, cucumber cows, moss carpets, sticks for doors which must be kept shut, sometimes cleaned, twig brooms, pet animals for stock with pastures and yards, all the domestic industries in pantomime, toadstools, lichens and puff-balls for bric-a-brac, while some older boy and girl may play parents with secret pet names, and younger ones as children, often for a whole term and in rare instances for years; all of this of course being almost always in the country. They baptize cats, bury dolls, have puppet shows with so many pins admission, all with elaborate details. They dress up and mimic other often older people, ride on the horse cars and imagine them fine carriages, get up doll hospitals and play surgeon or Florence Nightingale. The more severe the discipline of the play-teacher and the more savage the play-mother the better the fun.

One phase of this is exquisitely illustrated in the life of Hartley Coleridge, by his brother. His many conceptions of his own ego—e. g., by the picture Hartley, shadow Hartley, echo Hartley, etc.; his fancy that a cataract of what he named jug-force would burst out in a certain field, and flow between populous banks where an ideal government, long wars and even a reformed spelling illustrated in a journal devoted to the affairs of this realm, were all developed in his imagination where they existed with great reality for years; his stories to his mother continued for weeks; his reproduction of all he had seen in London, its theater, laboratory, and what he had read of wars, geographical divisions, in a large play-ground appropriated to his use,—these all illustrate this normal tendency, but in a degree of intensity probably morbid, much resembling the pseudo-hallucinations of Kandinsky. Two sisters used to say, "let us play we are sisters," thus making the relation more real. Cagliostro found adolescent boys particularly apt for his training to subserve the exhibition of the phrenological impostures illustrating his thirty-five faculties. He lied when he confessed he had lied, said a young Sancho Panza who had believed the wild tales of another boy who later confessed their falsity. Sir James Mackintosh in youth after read

ing Roman History used to fancy himself the emperor of Constantinople, and carry on the administration of the realm, hours at a time and often resumed for months. These fancies of his never amounted to conviction, but doubtless excited a faint expectation, which, had they been realized, would have lessened wonder. Charlotte Elizabeth lived largely in an imaginary realm for years in her youth.

In some games like "crazy mother," younger children are commanded, or older ones stumped or dared, to do dangerous things, like walking a picket fence or a high roof, etc., in which the spirit of play overcomes great natural timidity, and by playing school with other mates, or perhaps parents, they are helped by the play instinct to do hard examples and other hated tasks they had scarcely accomplished in actual schools. The stimulus and charm of the imagination makes them act a part different from their natural selves; some games need darkness to help out the fancy. It seems almost the rule that imaginative children are more likely to be dull in school work, and that those who excel in it are more likely to have fewer or less vivid mental images of their own. Especially with girls, it is chiefly those under ten or twelve who play most actively in our school yards, but those of thirteen or fifteen, who, under the apathy that generally affects girls of that age, walk in pairs, or small groups up and down the yard and talk, are no less imaginative. One early manifestation of the shadowy falsity to fact of the idealizing temperament is often seen in children of three or four, who suddenly assert that they saw a pig with five ears, a dog as big as a horse, or, if older, apples on a cherry tree, and other Munchausen wonders, which really means at first but little more than that they have that thought or have made that mental combination independently of experience. They come to love to tell semi-plausible stories, and perhaps when the astonishment is over to confess. Or, again, all stories of men and things they hear are given a setting in the natural scenery, or far less often, in the houses they know best, and their friends are cast in the rôles. The fancy of some children is almost visualization, and a few will tell at once, e. g., what was the color of Barbara Frietchie's dress, whether she wore glasses and a cap, just where in their father's sheep-pasture the goblin in the Arabian Nights rose out of the bottle, if pictures of these objects have not obviated the normal action of this faculty. Revery which materializes all wishes, and the mythopœic faculty which still occasionally creates a genuine myth among children, boys who amuse their mates with long and often clever yarns of their own invention, girls who make up ridiculous things about others—to all these the school has paid little attention, and Mr. Grad-

grind would war upon them all as inimical to scientific veracity. We might almost say of children at least, somewhat as Froschamer argues of mental activity, and even of the universe itself, that all their life is imagination. Such exercise of their faculties children must have even in the most platonic school republic. Its control and not its elimination is what is to be sought in the high interest of truthfulness. The progressive degeneration of the school reader, and the simultaneous development of flash literature for the young, has had much to do with the growth of evil tendencies in this field. To direct and utilize, so far as it needs it, this manifestation of the play-instinct, which, though sporting with lies so gracious and innocent, may lead to so many kinds of divorce of thought from reality and of self-deception, the whole question of how best to introduce the young to the best literature of the world, each kind and grade in fit time and proportion, must, we believe, be pondered, and to this problem we shall turn elsewhere. How much of this can best be appreciated in children, and, if its peculiar quality of fancy is once lost, must remain caviare to it, only those know who have realized in their own experience and observation how youthful minds find and play about the chief beauties of ballads, of Homer properly told in English, and of the radical conceptions and great situations in the choicest English writers, if only put in proper form. Psychologically imaginative literature is a direct development from this variety of play, and into this its unfoldment is natural.

VI. A less common class of what we may call pathological lies was illustrated by about a score of cases in our returns. The love of showing off and seeming big, to attract attention or to win admiration, sometimes leads children to assume false characters, e. g., on going to a new town or school, kept up with difficulty by many false pretenses awhile, but likely to become transparent and collapse, and getting the masquer generally disliked. A few children, especially girls, are honey-combed with morbid self-consciousness and affectation, and seem to have no natural character of their own, but to be always acting a part and attracting attention. Boys prefer fooling, and humbugging by tricks or lies, sometimes of almost preternatural acuteness and cleverness. Several, e. g., combined to make, what seemed, a very complex instrument with cords and pulleys and joints, called an "electrizer." Boys not in the secret were told to press smartly on the knob and they would feel a shock, when there was only a hidden pin. This is the normal diathesis which develops girls into hysterical invalids, deceiving sometimes themselves and sometimes their relatives, most on whom faith-curers work

genuine miracles, and which makes boys into charlatans and impostors of many kinds. It is hard for many to believe that certain women who fulfil their social and domestic duties creditably, can, with such placid naïveté, relate long series of occurrences which they know to be utterly false, and that men they meet are indulging a life long passion for deception, that they love the stimulus of violent ruptures with truth, or love lies for their own sake, as victims of other intoxicants love strong drink. The recent literature of both telepathy and hypnotism furnish many striking examples of this type. Accessory motives, love of applause, money, etc., are at first involved, but later what we may designate as a veritable *pseudomania* supervenes where lies for others, and even self-deception is an appetite indulged directly against every motive of prudence and interest. As man cannot be false to others if true to self, so he cannot experience the dangerous exhilaration of deceiving others without being in a measure his own victim, left to believe his own lie. Those who have failed in many legitimate endeavors learn that they can make themselves of much account in the world by adroit lying. These cases demand the most prompt and drastic treatment. If the withdrawal of attention and sympathy, and belief in the earlier manifestations, and if instruction and stern reprimand are not enough, there is still virtue in the rod, which should not be spared, and, if this fail, then the doctor should be called.

VII. Finally, children have many palliatives for lies that wound the conscience. If one says "really" or "truly," especially, if repeated, and most solemnly of all, "I wish to drop down dead this minute, if it is not so," the validity of any statement is greatly reduplicated. Only a child who is very hardened in falsehood, very fearful of consequences, or else truthful, will reiterate "it is so anyhow," even to tears in the face of evidence he cannot rebut, while others will confess or simulate a false confession as the easiest issue. Only young children who mistake for truth whatever pleases their elders, or, occasionally those too much commended for so doing, find pleasure in confessing what they never did. To say yes, and add in whisper, "in my mind," meant no, among the children of several schools at least in one large city. To put the left hand on the right shoulder also has power, many think, to reverse a lie, and even an oath may be neutralized or taken in an opposite sense by raising the left instead of the right hand. To think "I do not mean it," or to mean it in a different sense, sometimes excruciatingly different from what is currently understood was a form of mental reservation repeatedly found. If one *tries* not to hear

when called, he may say he did not hear, with less guilt. An acted lie is far less frequently felt than a spoken one, so to nod is less sinful than to say yes; to point the wrong way when asked where some one is gone, is less guilty than to *say* wrongly. Pantomimed lies are, in short, for the most part, easily gotten away with. It is very common for children to deny in the strongest and most solemn way wrongs they are accused of, and when, at length, evidence is overwhelming, to explain or to think, "My hand, or foot did it, not I." This distinction is not unnatural in children whose teachers or parents so often snap or whip the particular member which has committed the offence. In short, hardly any of the sinuosities lately asserted, whether rightly or wrongly, of the earlier Jesuit confessionals, and all the elaborated pharmacopœia of placebos they are said to have used to ease consciences outraged by falsehood, seem reproduced in the spontaneous endeavors of children to mitigate the poignancy of this sense of guilt.

In fine, some forms of the habit of lying are so prevalent among young children that all illustrations of it, like the above, seem trite and commonplace. Thorough-going truthfulness comes hard and late, and school life is so full of temptation to falsehood that an honest child is its rarest, as well as its noblest, work. The chief practical point is for the teacher to distinguish the different forms of the disease and apply the remedies best for each. So far from being a simple perversity, it is so exceedingly complex, and born of such diverse and even opposite tendencies, that a course of treatment that would cure one form, would sometimes directly aggravate another. If we pass from the standpoint of Mrs. Opie to the deeper, but often misconceived one of Heinroth, and strive to realize the sense in which all sin and all disease are lies, because perversions of the intent of Nature, we shall see how habitual falsehood may end, and in what in a broad sense it begins. A robust truth-speaking is the best pedagogic preparation for active life, which holds men up to the top of their moral condition above the false beliefs, false fears, and false shames, hopes, loves we are prone to. The effort to act a part or fill a place in life for which Nature has not made us, whether it be school-bred, or instinctively fascinating to intoxication as it is for feeble, characterless, psycho-physic constitutions, is one of the chief sources of waste of moral energy in modern society, lies, acted, spoken, imagined, give that morbid self-consciousness so titileting to neurotic constitutions. The habitual gratification of all a child's wishes indirectly cultivates mendacity, for truth requires a robust and hardy self-sacrifice,

which luxury makes impossible. Much society of strangers where "first impressions" are consciously made, favors it. Frequent change of environment, or of school or residence, favors it, for a feeling that "new leaves" can be easily turned arises. Frequent novelties, even of studies, probably cultivate one of its most incurable forms, viz., that state of nerves where the first impression is strong and vivid and pleasurable, while repetitions are indifferent, if not soon positively painful; a condition which, but for multiplying the already large number of mild manias, might be called *neomania*. Children should be shielded from both the professional mendacity and the false exaggeration of the abnormal of the modern newspaper, and held to long and firm responsibility for their acts and words. When men or civilization, yet capable of it, give up the lie and fall back to their best and truest selves, to be and to be accepted, from what they really are by nature and heredity, one of the highest and most intense of all pleasures is realized, which, though narrowed and conventionalized by many religious and dogmatic systems, is very manifold and may appear as general moral reformation, new intellectual insights, emotional easement and satisfaction, greater energy in action, and perhaps even greater physical betterment in certain forms of disease in certain temperaments, and, in a word, is still from the standpoint of scientific psychology, not unworthy the grand old—but greatly abused term—Regeneration.¹

ED.

¹ Much of the material here reported owes its value to the tact and indefatigability of Miss Sara E. Wiltse one of the collectors.